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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001992

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TAGS: HA KDEM PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: LAVALAS: A CONFLICT OF LEADERSHIP

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Classified By: Charge Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The pro-Aristide party, Fanmi Lavalas, is increasingly beset by infighting. A key divisive issue is that absentee party chairman and former president of Haiti Jean Bertrand Aristide continues to pull the strings and make leadership appointments from exile, while leading party figures in Haiti vie for pre-eminence and the right to represent the ex-President. Internal divisions and lack of strong local leadership are hampering current efforts to revive the party organization in preparation for upcoming Senate elections. END COMMENT.

¶2. (SBU) Poloff met with Lavalas senatorial candidate for the Center Department, Simon Dera (protect accordingly), on December 6. (Note: Simon Dera was a Lavalas Senator for the Center Department under the first Aristide presidency. During Aristide's second term, he is reputed to have been an Aristide operative and enforcer in the same region.) Dera claimed that Lavalas has suffered from a crisis of leadership ever since Aristide's departure. Despite party consensus on the need to restructure in preparation for the upcoming senatorial elections, party nominees for these prospective elections still face resistance within the party ranks. (Note: At the Lavalas regional congress held November 24 in the North Department, fighting amongst the Lavalas partisans broke out because supporters of Angelot Bell, former Director General of the Ministry of the Interior, opposed the party's selection of Nawoon Marcellus as the candidate for the North Department. End Note.)

¶3. (SBU) Dera underscored that factions within the party are challenging internal party order and impeding the process of restructuring. He identified four main factions: (1) members who are courting the current government's favor and whose identification with Lavalas is weak; (2) those seeking to seize party leadership from Aristide and the Executive Committee; (3) fence-sitters waiting to see where the balance of power tips before taking sides; and (4) fundamental Lavalasians.

¶4. (SBU) Dera explained the party's organizational structure. The head of the party is the National Representative, Jean Bertrand Aristide. The party in Haiti is led by an Executive Committee appointed by Aristide and answerable solely to him. Members of the Executive Committee are Marisse Narcisse, Annette Auguste (aka So Anne), Jacques Matelier, Lionnel Etienne and Serge Louis. (Note: Dera claimed that Serge Louis was a Miami, FL resident who party activists consider ineffective and not very active. End Note.) Below the Executive Committees lie several national-level Permanent

Committees, and below them the Departmental Commissions, which supervise communal and neighborhood commissions.

¶ 15. (SBU) The Permanent Committees, Dera stated, include the Mobilization Committee, led by Fritznel Maitre and Chimente Sylvestre; the Justice Committee, led by Emmanuel Cantave; the Professionals Committee, led by Yves Chrystallen; and the Communications Committee, led by Dr. Charlo. Dera claimed that fundamental Lavalasians are strongly represented in the Permanent Committees. Motivated by allegiance to the party's original ideals and their longevity within the party, leaders of the Permanent Committees are seeking working autonomy from the Executive Committee appointed by Aristide. Dera stated that the Permanent Committees feel the Executive Committee is weak and overly beholden to Yvonne Neptune (Prime Minister during Aristide's second term), and hence that they should not be answerable to the Executive Committee. Dera believes the Permanent Committees are scheming to replace the current Executive Committee with one of their choosing, with possible candidates being Stephane Alexis, Disme Cesar and Felito Doran.

¶ 16. (SBU) Dera explained that the party's Departmental Commissions oversee Lavalasian political outreach and development in each Department. They also supervise the communal and neighborhood commissions. So far, Dera claimed, Lavalas has set up these Departmental Commissions in seven departments. The South Department's Commission representative is former Deputy Francky Exeus; in the Center Department, Simon Dera; in the North Department, Nawoom Marcellus; in Nippes, Serge Gaspard; in the South-West Department, representatives Wilner Kontent and Madame Basile; in the Artibonite, Racine Billy; and in the North-West, Flaubert Duroseau. Dera opined that Lavalas has had a difficult time in the North-East Department due to the strong presence of wealthy incumbent "Fusion" Senator Rudolph Boulos.

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¶ 17. (C) An additional leadership battle, Dera stated, is taking place between the Executive Committee and Lavalas Senator Rudy Heriveaux. Dera related that the Executive Committee and a good majority of the party are miffed at Senator Heriveaux for his arbitrary claim to party leadership following Aristide's departure, a claim based on his status as a prominent Lavalas Senator since 2000. Dera believes that despite Heriveaux having some support within the party ranks, Senator Heriveaux's history shows he is not a true Lavalasian and has never been recognized as such. Lavalas endorsed Senator Heriveaux after the Senator approached them in 2000 following his second-place finish in the first round of the Senate elections. Correctly believing Heriveaux's chances were better than the Lavalas candidate, and also believing that Heriveaux would do Lavalas' bidding, Lavalas threw their support behind him and withdrew their own candidate. Heriveaux won the second round, and Lavalas subsequently endorsed him for President of the Chamber of Deputies.

¶ 18. (C) Lavalas Chamber of Deputies member Jonas Coffy provided Polcouns further details of internal Lavalas tensions in a meeting December 12. Coffy described himself as part of the younger Lavalas generation that fully supports the return of Aristide but opposes the practice of the exiled National Representative appointing party leaders. These leaders, including the National Representative, should be elected by party members in Haiti from among party activists living in Haiti. Coffy conceded that Annette Auguste (So Anne) had committed "errors" under Aristide's government. Coffy also opposed giving prominent roles, whether as party functionaries or as candidates for government office, to individuals who may be linked to drug trafficking. Coffy asked Polcouns whether the U.S. had narcotics cases against Simon Dera and Nawoon Marcellus (prominent Lavalas figure based in the North Department but active throughout the country). Polcouns responded that it was not possible to

provide this kind of information. Coffy declared that Lavalas should be a party organized from the bottom up, not from the top down.

¶9. (C) In an aside, Coffy revealed that five or six months earlier, Venezuelan President Chavez had personally invited Aristide to take up residence in Venezuela. Aristide had turned down the offer, in part because of concerns over his American-citizen wife.

¶10. (C) Comment: The departure of former President Aristide left the Lavalas party fractured and bereft of clear leadership. The current party leadership structure, with an Executive Committee answering solely to an absentee leader and hence lacking credibility, ensures a continuing leadership gap. It appears doubtful that efforts to resolve leadership issues and present a united front will bear fruit in time for the Senate elections. Continued infighting will hamper the selection of Senate candidates and possibly undermine the party's main message -- Haiti's redemption through the return of Aristide. The party is continuing to hold regional conferences in each Department in preparation for a national conference, which the party hopes will be chaired in Haiti by former President Aristide returned from exile (septel).

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